

Lesson 28: NONSENSE KNOWS

TIME: 20 minutes

PURPOSE: to teach the children how we can use our sense of nonsense as a technique to turn a poem into linguistic pleasure

Materials

boom box	markers
music	a puppet (you can call it The Word Wizard)
flip chart	stickers for kids

Suggested Books and Poems

The possibilities for material here are endless since most great kids' poets are in touch with their innate sense of the ridiculous.

Kennedy, Dorothy M. and X. J. Kennedy, eds. *Knock At a Star: A Child's Introduction to Poetry*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982.

Lee, Dennis. *Alligator Pie*. Toronto: MacMillan Publishers, 1990.

———. *Garbage Delight*. Toronto: MacMillan Publishers, 1989.

Prelutsky, Jack. *Scranimals*. New York: HarperCollins Children's Books, 2002.

Silverstein, Shel. *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. New York: HarperCollins Children's Books, 1974.

———. *A Light in the Attic*. New York: HarperCollins Children's Books, 1981.

———. *Falling Up*. New York: HarperCollins Children's Books, 1996.

Oh Beautiful Rhinoceros

by Jack Prelutsky

Oh beautiful rhinoceros,
So captivating, head to toes,
So aromatic, toes to head,
Enchantress of the flower bed,
Your blossoms cheer us every morn,
And we adore your tail and horn.
You soothe the eyes, delight the nose,
Most glorious rhinoceros.

A Clutch of Spinachickens

by Jack Prelutsky

A clutch of spinachickens
Is fussing in the yard,
They peck their meager pickings,
Their lives are dull and hard.
Except for paltry feathers,
They're mostly leafy green,
Their heads are smooth as leather,
Their brains are not too keen.

Some say that they're distasteful,
While others think they're sweet,
They're never very graceful,
They wilt at signs of heat.
They mill about all morning
Upon their scrawny legs,
Then cluck a single warning
And lay their turquoise eggs.

My Name Is . . .

by Pauline Clarke

My name is Sluggery-wuggery
My name is Worms-for-tea
My name is Swallow-the-table-leg
My name is Drink-the-Sea.

My name is I-eat-saucepans
My name is I-like-snails
My name is Grand-Piano-George
My name is I-ride-whales.

My name is Jump-the-chimney,
My name is Bite-my-knee,
My name is Jiggery-pokery,
And Riddle-me-ree, and ME.

The Ceiling

by Theodore Roethke

Suppose the Ceiling went Outside
And then caught Cold and Up and Died?
The only Thing we'd have for Proof
That he was Gone, would be the Roof;
I think it would be Most Revealing
To find out how the Ceiling's Feeling.

There Was a Man

by Dennis Lee

There was a man who never was.
This tragedy occurred because
His parents, being none too smart,
Were born two hundred years apart.

Knitted Things

by Karla Kuskin

There was a witch who knitted things:
Elephants and playground swings.
She knitted rain,
She knitted night,
But nothing really came out right.
The elephants had just one tusk
And night looked more
Like dawn or dusk.
The rain was snow
And when she tried
To knit an egg
It came out fried.
She knitted birds
With buttonholes
And twenty rubber butter rolls.
She knitted blue angora trees.
She purl stitched countless purple fleas.
She knitted a palace in need of a darn.
She knitted a battle and ran out of yarn.
She drew out a strand
Of her gleaming, green hair
And knitted a lawn
Till she wasn't there.

The Octopus

by Ogden Nash

Tell me, O Octopus, I begs,
Is those things arms, or is they legs?
I marvel at thee, Octopus;
If I were thou, I'd call me Us.

What I'd Do

by Lee Blair

If I were the King
 Of Kalamazone,
I'd smile and I'd laugh
 As I sat on my throne.

If I were a King
 of Kalamazin,
I'd perch on my throne
 With a big, broad grin.

But I am a child
 In Kalamazoo.
So what do you think
 That I mostly do?

I sit on my steps—
 for my throne is wood—
And I chuckle and laugh
 Like a great king should.

Did You Eever, Iver, Over?

Anonymous

Did you eever, iver, over
In your leef, life, loaf,
See the deevel, divel, dovel,
Kiss his weef, wife woaf?

No, I never, niver, nover
In my leef, life, loaf
Saw the deevel, divel, dovel
Kiss his weef, wife, woaf.

in Just—

by e. e. cummings

in Just—

spring when the world is mud—
luscious the little
lame balloon man

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old balloon man whistles
far and wee
and bettyandisbel come dancing

from hop-sotch and jump-rope and

it's
spring
and
 the
 goat-footed
balloonMan whistles

far
and
wee

What to Do

1. Select the poems you think the children will respond to best beforehand (four or five will do).
2. Begin with a silly song to warm up and invite the children to use silly gestures and body movements. You can model these movements for the kids to follow, or they can interpret your instructions. (Examples: shake, shake, shake your rumpus; fly like a wet gizzard; twirl and twirl as if the sky is falling.)
3. Using the Word Wizard puppet, ask each child to make up a silly word when the puppet points its wand in his or her direction. Write their words/comments on the flip chart.
4. Explain to the kids that poetry can be about something silly or nonsensical, or nonsense can be used to write a poem by making up ridiculous words, places and people, or by arranging words in weird ways.
5. Choose how many poems you want to read and read each one. Ask the kids to talk about why each poem is silly.
6. You may want to generate a list of particularly silly words or turns of phrases within the poems and ask the children to discuss their meaning. (Or, you can ask the children to be dramatic and act out certain words if you want.)
7. Pick a poem the children respond well to and ask the children to make up lines for a response poem. These lines should be especially silly. You can give them some warm-up nonsense words such as: gibbergoo, hiramoot, kimmirt, veef, catroo, mack-aracka.
8. You can begin with the title "A Silly Poem." Some kids may want to use gibberish while others will want to focus on a silly situation. For a sample poem generated by a class of four year-olds, consult "Room 202's Silly Poem" below.
9. Ask the Word Wizard puppet to read the poem back to the kids in a silly voice.
10. Record the originals and the inventions on paper and make copies for the children to put in their chapbooks.

Here are some examples:

The Schlokotoes (based on "The Octopus," above)

by Kids with Imagination

Tell me, O Schlokotoes, I knows,
Is those things toes, or is they noses?
I marvel at thee heckalamelee;
If I were thou, I'd call me Roses.

Room 202's Silly Poem

(This poem was written at the Jewish Community Center in Tucson by a class of four year-olds taught by Visiting Poet Wendy Burk.)

Take a bath with stickers and stick them in your hair.
I was taking a bath with an eye and I ate the bathtub up and the soap.
An apple sat on a wizard and we really wanted to pookie.
If you had a fishy in your bathtub it would be fishies in there and there
would be a lot of eggs and they would go down the drain.
Eating an ice cream cone sitting in the bathtub on a boat with soap.
One day I stuck a dirty fish in the bathtub.
Stick your head in the water with your fishy and tummy.

The Tacoroach

(This poem was written by Visiting Poet Maurynne Maxwell for students at Hudlow Elementary School in Tucson.)

The Tacoroach is wily;
the Tacoroach is cool.
You'll find him roaming all around
the fields of Hudlow School.

His head is full of lettuce,
his mouth is full of cheese;
his red eyes are like tomatoes
and are found behind his knees.

Be happy, very happy,
if you stumble on the Tacoroach—
for not very far behind him
will be found the rare MilkChocoroach!